

SOUTHWEST FISHERIES SCIENCE CENTER
SECOND QUARTER REPORT-FY 2003
For the period January 1, 2003 through March 31, 2003

Submitted by: John Hunter, Division Director, Fisheries Resources Division

Title of Accomplishment: Complete Highly Migratory Species (HMS) Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC).

Current Status: The Pacific Council adopted the HMS FMP on October 28, 2002, but submission to NMFS is still pending Council reconsideration of its preferred high seas longline management option.

Background Information: Last March, after public review, the Council adopted to delay final action on the plan to provide time for the Plan Development Team to complete additional analyses requested by NMFS, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, and others. Many of the comments dealt with legal requirements. A complete revision of the plan was then presented to the Council at its October-November 2002 meeting, and was subsequently approved with some additional changes. These revisions were completed by the Plan Team in January 2003. In February 2003, NMFS' SWR asked the Council to delay official submission of the plan to NMFS to consider statistical analysis of new observer data from the California high seas fishery before final decision on its high-seas longline management option. At issue was the targeting of swordfish east of 150EW longitude and potential risk to protected species such as sea turtles. The Council agreed to postpone until March 2003, at which time it will decide whether to postpone further, and will probably reconsider the high-seas longline option in June 2003. Division biologists and economists have contributed substantially to the plan, including preparation of the stock assessment, fisheries description, EFH, regulatory analyses, and socio-economic impact sections.

Purpose of Activity: To complete the plan, incorporating all Council revisions to the September 2002 draft presented to the Council Oct-Nov 2002. Also to complete final revisions prior to the Council's submission of the plan to NMFS in 2003 for approval and plan implementation.

Description of Accomplishment and Significant Results: The U.S. West Coast HMS FMP provides a basic framework FMP that meets the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and authorizes actions to be taken, and specifies and analyzes the minimum initial regulations that must be implemented when the FMP is implemented. It includes a review of what is known of the 13 management unit species, their stock status, and a comprehensive description of their fisheries. It reviews current state regulations, harvest levels, bycatch and protected species interactions, and socio-economics. It also designates essential fish habitat and presents various proposed and alternative management measures, including various fixed elements such as allowable gear types for HMS, harvest control rules, measures for bycatch reduction, and flexible measures .

Significance of Accomplishment: This new FMP will provide an efficient way to address HMS issues of regional, national, and international concern; a way to address important issues in an open, public process; and a basis to increase federal investment in research, data collection and stock assessments. It also facilitates collaboration with the other Pacific area councils concerning HMS issues and ensures that the PFMC is involved in deciding how international measures are applied to U.S. fisheries. In addition, it provides a mechanism to obtain public comment and provide advice to NMFS and the Department of State, so that West Coast interests are represented in international negotiations and decision-making.

Problems: Final submission postponed pending analysis and review of new NMFS SWR observer data on protected species risks in the California-based high seas longline fishery.

Contact: Sue Smith (858-546-7070) [also Dale Squires, David Au, and Sam Herrick].